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ABSTRACT

A large percentage of American youth enters the job market ill-prepared and lacking basic skills: the majority of our working population is not adequately prepared for the occupations in which they find themselves. Too many job changes, dissatisfaction, and a lack of systematic preparatory and continuing education have led to the productivity crisis in American industry. Taking a critical look at our career guidance and its underlying principles and comparing them tc European practices points to the need for re-thinking cur approach. In developing a basis for vocational choice, we need to start at the pre-school level and consistently aim at the develcpment of skills, attitudes, and experiences for children throughout schcol, with emphasis on the practical. Even handicapped persons can be made employable, as the success of European schools shcws. It is necessary to base a systematic career development program on psychological foundations, applying realistic concepts of work, human decision-making, and human nature. School curricula, from kindergarten through high schccl, should be grounded in the practical, letting students learn use cf tools from early years in order to develcp basic skills. Arts, crafts, and shop activities should be included for all students throughout their school years. (Author/KC)

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Challenges of Educating Today's Youth: Entry -- Retention -- Graduation

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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" Career and Vocational Guidance and Development "

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Introductory Remarks:

The problem of American education today can well be seen under these three aspects that appear in the topic of this conference:

- Entry: A large percentage of our youth n e v e r or only very late enters the occupational world as well-prepared and skilled individuals. We will hardly get any accurate figures how many young men and women just take any job that is offered to them and never have an opportunity to choose a profession or fulfilling occupation corresponding to their talents, potentials, and likings. But the fact can easily be verified that many American young men and women are unemployable. The highest percentage of unemployed Americans is in the 16 to 25 year-old bracket!)
- Retention: The majority of our working population is in unstable positions. Many are for some length of time jobless, many change occupations within a few years. Most of our workers are dissatisfied with their jobs and would change if another opportunity arose.
- Graduation: Almost all of our working people (both blue and white collar categories) have not been prepared for the occupations in which they work but acquired the skills and experiences after many years

of work in the field. Most of the working people do not stay long enough in an occupation to work"up" to the higher levels of competence but gets stuck or changes to other occupations.

This is a sharp contrast to European countries with similar social and economic conditions, particularly the Western European countries. While we feel now, in this country, the impact of the above cited facts, both in economy and industry, the Europeans (and Japanese!) are moving ahead of the United States in these areas. It is high time that we realise how far we have fallen back, all the more as we do no longer "import" any skilled workers from the Old World but increasingly add unskilled man-power to our economy and industry!

The following paragraphs discuss possibilities to change the facts by applying some of the principles and experiences of vocational and career education in Western Europe. The author has been a counselor in a German Boys Town for many years and did extensive research on career development in Western European countries.

I. A Critical Look at Our Career Guidance

The inadequacy of our career guidance practice has been recognized late enough. In a recent publication, Eli Ginzberg speaks of the inadequacy of our vocational counselling, done in schools by people who have mostly "poor background and experience". Both the counselors who are mostly former teachers, and the youngsters have poor information on occupations. It is necessary that counselors have practical experience and the youngsters have opportunities to observe (first hand) what the world of work looks like.(1)

The European schools have long ago established a so-called "orientation year" for the graduates of the elementary schools, and a system of career counselling by the Labor Office (a municipal or state agency).

We would have to add to Ginzberg's critique that even if we had experienced and well-trained counsellors as the Europeans do, their guidance would still be of limited value to our youngsters as all of them never had an opportunity to develop competencies and skills, let alone the positive attitudes which are the basis for any occupational choice!

It is necessary to examine briefly the <u>theoretical and practical aspects of the occupational choice</u>: It is again Eli Ginzberg[2] who addresses himself to the problem of making the decision on an occupation and career. He mentions three major qualities in this decision-making process:

a. It is open-ended. This means that there is no specific point at which the decision can be made. But the earlier a youngster is able to make such a decision, the better. The often-mentioned undesirability of an early tracking forgets the psychological and educational principles which have to be considered (and which we will discuss more detailedly below) and which will prevent the feared narrowness of an early determination of an occupational career. At the same time, the open-endedness means that the decision will and cannot be final. A fluctuant job-market and unstable economic conditions require flexibility and force most of us to make new decisions even in later years.

Ginzberg revised his previous opinion on the second point:

b. It is reversible. Before, Ginzberg held, that the decision is irreversible.(2) He saw that it has been quite often reversed, for reasons which we saw above (fluctuant job market...). What he did not mention is a much more important aspect: Learning theories show that a broad and in-depth background in any field provides much more flexibility than a superficial or narrow background. There <u>is</u> a transfer of learning ("formal discipline") and the experience of European vocational education shows that workers with a profound background in any trade (usually a three to four year apprenticeship) allows for more flexibility and the ability of an individual to move into even remote occupations. Only those who had a sporadic or on-the-job training had to start all over again once they had to switch to other occupations.

A longer and thorough preparation pays off even when

the individual does not work in the respective occupation after the training. There have been several educational theorists and practicioners, who advocated such an approach: Karl Marx, in the last century, with his demand for a "polytechnical education", John Dewey, earlier in this century, with the emphasis on "occupational education", and -- most successfully -- Georg Kerschensteiner whose idea of the Arbeitsschule (= industrial school) influenced most of European education in the first half of this century(3)

c. It should aim at optimization, not at compromises.

Too many of our youngsters have been led to believe that you have to settle somewhere and compromise on your dreams. Usually they do settle for less because of limited opportunities and a lack of basic skills, but even more because of a lack of motivation and a positive self-image! We know from psychology that a positive self-image comes from mastery (basic skills) and attitudes (motivation) towards others and one's activities. We can improve self-confidence and the self-image in our youngsters to an optimum when we lead them to success! How ever limited the range may be within which an individual can be successful -- e.g. a handicapped youngster -- there are always competencies which one can achieve. Again, the success of European special education programs for handicapped youth and the relatively high number of employable handicapped show that this is possible.

(The author has a movie on a big Rehabilitation Center in West Germany which shows how even severely handicapped youngsters, so-called Thalydomide children, can be educated and trained for employability!)

II. Developing the Basis for Vocational Choice

If we accept career counselling as "counselling" and not "channelling", i.e. to help individuals to make their own decisions about their future, then we have to concern ourselves primarily with providing or developing the basis for such decsions! The question is:

"Where to start?" The old "golden rule" of education, that we should start to teach things when it is "possible and necessary" can well be applied here: It is not only necessary but also possible that we start as early as possible -- in Kindergarten age! Experts in child development confirm that a young child can and must develop competencies in skills which, later on, are of fundamental value in any occupation. Piaget's description of the "concrete operations" and Eriksons emphasis on "competency motivation" have not sufficiently been understood by many teachers and therefore rarely are applied in our schools. In the German Kindergarten (= Nursery! not the pre-school year!), children learn to use the hammer and nails, along with other practical skills. The Montessori schools emphasize the proper use of tools and orderliness. For the children it is play, later on it is a necessary skill. Our concern with children's readiness focusses too much on academic, cognitive skills (reading and writing) and less on the fundamental pre-requisites for these skills, such as dexterity, motor skills, etc. The high number of children in our elementary schools that are labelled "learning disabled" and the low incidence of this problem in European schools should make us aware of the causes of such problems! Long ago, Kephart pointed to causes for "slow learning" (4) but this has not been

heard by our elementary teachers, nor by those who advocate early schooling (i.e. reading and writing).

The primary task of elementary school lies not only in teaching the "three R's" but also in

- developing interests, that go beyond reading and writing;
- developing skills, that go beyond the academic which make up only a fraction of the skills we exercise in our everyday lives and at work. We need much more the practical skills, whatever activities we are engaged in!
- developing attitudes in the social (cooperation!) and personal (character, discipline) realm. Our behavior is <u>not</u> based on stimuli alone, as the behaviorists want it, but much more on attitudes and our will. The negative attitude which many of our school children have towards work of any sort stems widely from their un-developed (weak) will and the predominantly passive role which they have to play during the school hours.
- develop and foster aspirations. Our children do no longer have dreams and aspirations as we ridicule them as "unrealistic" and try to convince already the children that only money and status count. While the child's aspirations to become a pilot or baseball star might <u>be</u> unrealistic, they serve as strong motivators. Just as these goals change so often, the child tries out and develops many skills in the course of years, and eventually a specific talent evolves!
- provide linkages for the child's experiences: toys relate to reality (though most of the toys we buy for our kids are the opposite: all these batman and Star Wars "toys" lead more to stupidity than to reality, and the war toys to violence and aggression!)

the school curriculum should relate to work (Dewey already demanded that the school reflect "in embryonic form" the occupations and structures of society!) and the teachers should tie in the parents with his/her efforts to lead a child into "the real world". The views and the experience of the various professions represented in the parents of a classroom never are connected to the school curriculum. But all of the children will later on have to decide for one or the other of these professions or occupations! We are no longer in the Middle Ages, where the baker's son would simply become a baker, and his daughter marry a baker journeyman! At that time, career decisions were left to the parents!

- provide guidance: the school has taken over many tasks that were originally the parents' responsibility. The whole set-up of an industrialized society with its separation of work and life (in the Middle Ages and in rural settings, people work where they live and the youngsters could not only observe regularly what adults are doing but also were allowed -- or forced -- to help. This provided the first-hand experience which our youth no longer has!) The school must somehow provide for contacts (not just talks about) with the real world and lead to the point where a youngster can make his/her decision on the basis of insights and reliable information.

  - Especially the guidance of disadvantaged children must be geared to practical experience and consider the specific limitations (particularly in the cognitive domain) of the individuals. Here the "verbal" guidance is useless (as it is with "normal" children!).

> Only practical experience and the development of various skills within the given limits of a specific handicap can lead a youngster to the point where he/she can decide on an occupation. The fears of so many parents and educators that handicapped persons should not be allowed to choose "boring" (or low-level) occupations are often unrealistic. Intellectually handicapped persons are not always bored but like repetitious and non-challenging occupations. This does not mean that any one should be talked or channelled into such work but we should let a youngster choose if he/she wants to do this type of work. The more competencies such a person has veveloped, the more of freedom of choice will he/she have!

Speaking of handicapped and disadvantaged children and youth, we are tempted to label most of our youngsters as disadvantaged! Virtually all of our youth has become passive through the predominant "activity": watching TV, watching sports games, watching and listening in the long school days... Also, the large number of working mothers who come home in the evening tired and nervous reflect upon the children a negative image of work. When people always come home tired, wound-up and complaining, then work must be something bad...
Many youngsters have no father and thus no role model that would relate to the world of work. We cannot ignore these factors that counter-act the development of a positive attitude towards work and a career.

III. Psychological Foundations of a Systematic Career Development.

a. The Concept of Work: Only the complete act of work in its three steps is fulfilling and meaningful for the individual.

"opus" - the idea of what I want to make, existing only in the mind and undergoing modifications as I work towards its realization.

"labor" - the effort to find and transform material that lends itself to the goals. It implies the skills and knowledge of using the proper tools and methods to transform the given or chosen materials.

opus - the realization of the conceived idea, the real thing that evolved from my work.

Most of industrial work is only a fragment. The worker does not need to have an idea of what it is going to be, as he makes only parts, nor does he ever see the completed item. If he does, he will give it away and receive, instead, money for his work. The difference in satisfaction is known: when I make something "all by myself" and when I can "show it off" is pleasure. Making only a part and receive only an abstract reward (a grade, money, etc) is far different!
Too many youngsters (and adults) have never or not for a long time experienced the satisfaction can comes with a complete work. We all have been "conditioned" to receive tokens (money, grades etc) instead of the concrete fruits of our work. The resurgence of hobbies and crafts is a reaction to fragmentized work.

b. <u>The practical orientation of most individuals</u>.

According to a survey of Kohlberg and DeVries[5] about 45% of the 16 to 20 year old population is still in the "concrete operations stage" (Piaget's stages) and not quite competent in the "formal", i.e. abstract realm. Our schools do not recognize this, nor do we take into consideration that most of an adult's activities in everyday life and at work require more physcial skills than cognitive competencies. Even the intellectual worker applies many physical skills in everyday life!). Rather do the cognitive competencies increase and the physical decrease as the students ascend the ladder of the schools: from elementary to college. The Ph.D. who is uncapable of driving a nail into a wall is a common phenomenon.

c. <u>The individual as a decision maker.</u> The predominant passive role which students play in our schools are not conducive to developing the ability to make decisions. But work -- and life -- demand such decisions from the individual. One of the most important decisions in life is the choice of a career as work makes up most of our wake hours. This will remain so in the future, how ever advanced technology might become. Of course, industrial lab or does not allow for much "co-determination". Nevertheless, the individual needs to be led to this "competency," and the more skills one has, the more of a choice will exist. Satisfaction and a positive self-image arises from this freedom for and the success of decision-making.

IV. Conclusions

Career development and counselling must be based on practical experience, both of the counsellor and the counselee. Only on the basis of skills which a counselee masters and of realistic information on an occupation can the individual make a choice and decision as to an occupation.
These skills should be developed in a sequential systematic structure, beginning as early as Kindergarten age and comprise the fundamental occupational activities of contemporary life:

on the Kindergarten level: simple arts and crafts (clay, paper, cardboard, wood) develop skills as modelling folding, cutting, drawing, painting, nailing, etc.

on the elementary level: arts and crafts develop further competence with simple tools (hammer, nail, saw, drill, glue) working with wood, metal, fabric, ceramic, plastic, etc) allowing the child as much as possible freedom in the choice of objects he/she wants to make.

upper elementary (junior high) and high school:

in addition to arts and crafts -- on a regular basis! -- field trips and observation periods that allow the students to see on their own the various occupations should be scheduled. (factories, offices, hospitals, schools, stores, warehouses, airports, railroad yards, etc...) This orientation is an important component in career guidance and should make use of the people in the respective fields, who may come to the school and talk to the students. But the talk makes sense only when it can supplement first-hand observation!

The schools should be equipped with a simple but functional workshop (arts and crafts room) with work benches and useful basic tools. Materials can often we obtained through local industry.

Teachers should be trained for arts-and-crafts at the teacher training institutions and/or volunteers or instructors may be recruited from industry. (In Europe, all elementary teachers have to take courses in arts and crafts and are able to conduct such classes on the elementary level, just as all schools have a well-equipped work.room or at least the necessary equipment.)
Particularly Special Education needs such a component in the curriculum and trained teachers that can conduct such classes.

All decision-making in the area of career and vocation is basically determined by attitudes. The positive attitudes towards work develop only through activities, not rhrough verbal and cognitive skills. The importance of activities and quality in performance (complete - neat - correct) should be stressed throughout the school curriculum (academic and practical!). Children should be led to success on each level. The tasks should thus be carefully geared to their abilities and handicaps! The graduated levels (from the simple to the complex) must be mastered before a student can move up to the next higher. Emphasis must be on the basic skills and their mastery. They will determine the attitudes towards work in general, and provide the basis for the decision on a career (see above).

Teachers and Counselors must have a positive attitude towards work. Only such individuals should be allowed to counsel youngsters who have worked sucessfully and for some length of time in industry or in a trade. While the availability of such individuals is limited at this time, help might be required from industry to "lend out" people. The teacher training institutions should establish programs for vocational education

that include a year's practicum in various occupations. Industry would not hesitate to accommodate such "worker-students" as they have a genuine interest in vocational education.

It can be done: even handicapped individuals are employable in most European countries! The experience of these countries can help us, in modified ways, to make a start. America can no longer afford to waste the majority of youth and leave skills and competencies undeveloped that could contribute to society and economy and enable individuals to find meaning and fulfillment in their lives.

References

[1] Eli Ginzberg, "A Critical Look at Career Guidance" in: Stephen G. Weinrach, ed., Career Counseling, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1979), pp. 32 ff.

[2] ibid., pp. 127 ff.

[3] Diane Simons, Georg Kerschensteiner. His Thought and Relevance Today, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966).

[4] Newell C. Kephart, The Slow Learner in the Classroom, (Columbus OH: Chas. E. Merrill Books, 1960.)

[5] Kohlberg & DeVries, "Relations between Piaget and Psychometric Assessment of Intelligence" in: Lavatelli, ed., The Natural Curriculum, (Urbana IL: University of Illinois, 1971).